

SBA

U.S. Small Business Administration

Business Coaches

Mentors for Small Business Success

Do You Want to Be a Business Coach?

The U.S. Small Business Administration is seeking volunteer business coaches to help aspiring and existing entrepreneurs in their quest for success.

What is a business coach?

A business coach is a business professional or successful business owner who oversees, assists and guides a protégé business owner in developing, starting, and growing a successful small business. A coach helps a protégé in clarifying business goals and objectives and in developing the skills and acquiring the resources needed to operate a successful enterprise. Coaches —

- guide a protégé in enhancing his or her business skills and intellectual development;
- provide candid feedback to the protégé about his or her strengths and weaknesses while providing guidance on measures which build on these strengths and eliminate the weaknesses;
- aid a protégé in identifying business opportunities;
- advise the protégé on how to deal with and overcome problems with operating a small firm;
- link the protégé with the right professionals/organizations to assist in problem solving and through transitional periods in starting and growing a small enterprise;
- assist the protégé in balancing both personal and business life;
- listen to and advise the protégé on issues and concerns involving his or her firm;
- provide solutions to the protégé's business problems but require the protégé to carry out and implement the solutions;
- teach the protégé what he or she knows to allow the protégé to apply this knowledge in operating his or her firm;
- encourage and motivate the protégé; and
- build the protégé's sense of self-worth and confidence.

What Do Protégés Need From a Business Coach?

Business owners seeking the expert guidance of business coaches typically look for coaches who not only are successful business owners or professionals, but who also have a genuine interest in assisting them and the time to devote to their effort. Protégés look to their coaches for —

- encouragement and support,
- candid information and advice,
- guidance and suggestions,
- an honest appraisal of their business, as well as their entrepreneurial capabilities,
- a willingness to share their business experience,
- links to business and industry experts and resources,
- help in seeing the total picture,
- help in determining business goals and objectives,
- help in identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as guidance in building on strengths and eliminating weaknesses, and
- time and a willingness to work with the protégé in a one-to-one relationship.

What Are Some Characteristics of a Good Business Coach?

The following characteristics are crucial traits in a coach and can make the difference between the success or failure of a coach/protégé relationship:

- Supportive of the business needs and aspirations of the protégé; encourages the protégé business owner to accept business-related challenges and overcome the difficulties of operating a small business.
- Patient and willing to provide adequate time to interact with the protégé.
- Respected by business professionals and business owners and perceived as a role model.

- People-oriented with a genuine interest in people and a desire to help others; knows how to effectively communicate and listen actively; able to offer guidance in resolving business-related problems; feels a sense of social commitment and responsibility toward the community.
- Good motivator who inspires the protégé to reach his or her fullest potential through encouragement, feedback and effective guidance.
- Effective teacher who helps to manage and guide the protégé's learning — that is, actively recognizes and uses teaching/learning opportunities to enhance the performance of the protégé in operating a small business.
- Self confident and appreciative of a protégé's developing strengths and abilities; enjoys being involved in the growth and development of the protégé's enterprise.
- Achiever who sets realistic business goals, continually evaluates them and strives to reach them; challenges and motivates the protégé to reach his or her fullest potential.

What Is Effective Coaching?

A coach helps a novice protégé learn specific business management concepts and techniques to overcome performance difficulties. When coaching, remember to do the following:

- Describe the business management skills that you want the protégé to acquire.
- Remind the protégé why these business skills are important.
- Explain in detail how to approach a business task/activity.
- Demonstrate the desired approach for carrying-out the business task or activity.
- Observe the protégé's performance; and
- Evaluate the performance by giving feedback.

What Is Most Important in a Coaching Relationship?

The key to an effective coach/protégé relationship is commitment by both parties. They must be willing to devote their time to establish trust and nurture a good rapport. Other essential traits which enhance the coach/ protégé relationship are:

1. Respect — established through the recognition of the coach's knowledge, skills and abilities and of the protégé's desire to develop his or her capabilities and experiences.
2. Trust — built through communication, availability, predictability and loyalty between coaches and protégés.
3. Partnership building — established through the recognition that the coach and the protégé are professional partners. Natural barriers that partnerships face may include miscommunication or an uncertainty of each other's expectations.
Measures which can be used to overcome these challenges:
 - Maintaining an open line of communication
 - Resolving obvious problems
 - Forecasting how decisions may affect business goals
 - Monitoring action plans
4. Realistic expectations — established as the coach encourages the protégé to set realistic, attainable business goals and assists the protégé in attaining these goals.
5. Time — recognized as perhaps the most crucial of all elements in a coach/protégé relationship. The parties should set aside a specific time to meet, initially as often as once or twice weekly; as the relationship develops less time may be needed.

Why Is Feedback Critical to the Coaching Process?

Coaching primarily involves feedback on business performance. A coach generally gives two kinds of feedback: positive feedback to reinforce positive business management skills, and constructive feedback to change business management skills that are inadequate or need improvement. Both types of feedback are critical to the protégé's development of business management skills. Knowing how to provide both positive and constructive feedback will make coaching an easier task. Feedback should be:

- Frequent. Give frequent constructive feedback so the protégé will have a clear understanding of his or her progress.
- Specific. Focus the feedback on what, how, when and why.
- Direct. Tell the protégé what the coach has directly observed, the impact and consequences of his or her performance on the business.

When giving feedback, don't use judgemental labels, particularly negative ones, don't exaggerate the issue(s), and always phrase issues as statements, not questions.

It is good practice to set up a regular schedule for providing feedback. The schedule should be based on individual need and the business development activities of the protégé.

What Are Some Signs of a Successful Coaching Relationship?

- The protégé is open to change and transition, to exploring business possibilities, and learning from others.
- Both parties are inspired by the relationship and gain a great deal of satisfaction from it.
- There is a commitment to understanding and growing, and to confronting and working toward solutions to business problems that may arise.
- The protégé feels a bond or connection with the coach, experiencing the relationship as one of value in which mutual interest, respect and straightforward communication are constants.
- The coach brings to the relationship his or her experience, skills and success. It is through the guidance and support of the coach that a protégé acquires the in-depth knowledge and skills to operate a successful enterprise.
- The protégé brings a desire to succeed to the relationship and has a commitment and willingness to learn from his or her coach and to follow the coach's advice.

What Are the Stages of Coaching?

Coaching consists of different stages reflecting the protégé business owner's learning and growth needs. Each stage may require the coach to assume different coaching roles. Each stage blends into the other. Roles listed under a stage are not exclusive to that stage, but indicate when coaches are most likely to be performing that role.

The four main stages of coaching are:

- Prescriptive
- Collaborative
- Persuasive
- Confirmative

To determine at which stage to begin the relationship, the coach and protégé must consider these issues:

- What are the protégé's knowledge, skills and abilities relative to operating a small business?
- What is the protégé's level of business experience?
- What type and amount of business-related guidance and support does the protégé need?

These questions can be answered through discussions with the protégé and by observing the protégé during the day-to-day operation of his or her firm.

Coaching relationships may follow all four stages or only several of these stages. In fact, there is such a fine line between each stage that frequently it is difficult to tell when one stage ends and another begins. The coach needs to re-evaluate the coaching relationship as it evolves and determine when it is time to alter the coaching roles. The coach must keep in mind that the relationship will stagnate if the coaching style remains in a stage that the protégé has outgrown.

Prescriptive Stage

In the first stage of coaching, the protégé small business owner usually will have little if any experience in owning and operating a small business. During this stage the coach directs and advises the protégé, assuming the role of both teacher and motivator and aiding in building the self-confidence of the protégé.

The coach devotes more time to the protégé in this stage focusing on providing detailed information to the protégé on business-related issues and on business management concepts and techniques. The coach shares many of his or her own experiences, trials, approaches to and solutions for operating a successful enterprise. Examples of how he or she and others have handled similar business issues and problems and the consequences of these approaches are shared with the protégé business owner.

Persuasive Stage

The second stage requires the coach to actually persuade the protégé business owner to find answers and seek challenges, rather than getting them from the coach. At this time, the protégé usually has some experience but needs

firm direction. The protégé may need to be prodded into taking risks. The coach accomplishes this task by suggesting new strategies, questions and challenges — pushing the protégé into discoveries.

Collaborative Stage

In this stage, the protégé has enough experience and ability to work together with the coach to jointly solve business-related problems and participate in developing and implementing new business strategies. The protégé business owner actively works with the coach in business planning strategies and in the day-to-day operation of the protégé's firm. During this stage of the relationship, the coach encourages the protégé to work more independently. He or she provides the protégé with advice on handling a specific business activity and allows the protégé to handle the situation with little guidance from the coach. Should a problem arise which the protégé is unable to handle, the coach is there to assist by sharing his or her experience and expertise to guide the protégé through the situation.

Confirmative Stage

This is the stage in which the protégé business owner has acquired a lot of experience and has mastered the principles and techniques for operating a successful small business. In this capacity, the coach acts as a business advisor sharing his or her wisdom and professional insight into future goals, objectives and the direction of the business. He or she also provides links to business and industry experts and resources. The coach may continue performing many of the previous roles, but most important, the coach is a sounding board and empathetic listener. The coach gives advice and encouragement in a non-judgmental manner about business decisions and assumes his or her most significant role as a sponsor.

For More Information

- SBA offices are located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam. For the office nearest you, look under "U.S. Government" in your telephone directory, or call the SBA Answer Desk.
- SBA Answer Desk: 1-800-U-ASK-SBA
- Fax: 202-205-7064
- TDD: 704-344-6640
- Your rights to regulatory fairness: 1-800-REG-FAIR
- OnLine Electronic Bulletin Board (*modem and computer required*)
 - 1-800-697-4636 (limited access)
 - 1-900-463-4636 (full access)
 - 202-401-9600 (D.C. metro area)
- Internet
 - Home page: www.sba.gov
 - Gopher: <gopher.sba.gov>
 - File transfer protocol: <ftp.sba.gov>
 - Telnet: <telnet.sba.gov>
 - U.S. Business Advisor: www.business.gov

SBA Affiliates

Inquire at your local SBA office for the location nearest you.

- BICs — Business Information Centers
- TBICs — Tribal Business Information Centers
- OSCSs — One Stop Capital Shops
- SCORE — Service Corps of Retired Executives
- SBDCs — Small Business Development Centers
- USEACs — U.S. Export Assistance Centers
- WBCs — Women's Business Centers

SBA Publications

Call your local SBA office or the SBA Answer Desk.

- *The Resource Directory for Small Business Management* — a listing of low-cost business management publications and videotapes
- *The Facts About . . . SBA Publications* — a listing of free SBA publications

Listing of SBA Offices by State and City

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| AK | Anchorage |
| AL | Birmingham |
| AR | Little Rock |
| AZ | Phoenix |
| CA | Fresno |
| | Glendale |
| | Sacramento |
| | San Diego |
| | San Francisco |
| | Santa Ana |
| CO | Denver |
| CT | Hartford |
| DC | Washington, D.C. |
| DE | Wilmington |
| FL | Coral Gables |
| | Jacksonville |
| GA | Atlanta |
| GU | Mongmong |
| HI | Honolulu |
| ID | Boise |
| IA | Cedar Rapids |
| | Des Moines |
| IL | Chicago |
| | Springfield |
| IN | Indianapolis |
| KS | Wichita |
| KY | Louisville |
| LA | New Orleans |
| MA | Boston |
| | Springfield |
| MD | Baltimore |
| ME | Augusta |
| MI | Detroit |
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| MN | Minneapolis |
| MO | Kansas City |
| | St. Louis |
| | Springfield |
| MS | Gulfport |
| | Jackson |
| MT | Helena |
| NC | Charlotte |
| ND | Fargo |
| NE | Omaha |
| NH | Concord |
| NJ | Newark |
| NM | Albuquerque |
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| NY | Buffalo |
| | Elmira |
| | Melville |
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| | Rochester |
| | Syracuse |
| OH | Cincinnati |

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| | Cleveland |
| | Columbus |
| OK | Oklahoma City |
| OR | Portland |
| PA | Harrisburg |
| | Philadelphia |
| | Pittsburgh |
| | Wilkes-Barre |
| PR | Hato Rey |
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| UT | Salt Lake City |
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| VT | Montpelier |
| WA | Seattle |
| | Spokane |
| WI | Madison |
| | Milwaukee |
| WV | Charleston |
| | Clarksburg |
| WY | Casper |

Disaster Area Offices are located in the following cities:

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|----|---------------|
| CA | Sacramento |
| GA | Atlanta |
| NY | Niagara Falls |
| TX | Ft. Worth |

In addition to the above listing of SBA field offices, there are approximately 1,000 small business development center locations and almost 800 SCORE locations to help you start and/or strengthen your business.

All of the SBA's programs and services are provided to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis .

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